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VACATION EXPERIENCES



Merced and Babcock Lakes

Early in July it was my good fortune to take a five-day hike in the Yosemite High Sierra, accompanied by Elmer Aldrich, a member of the Audubon Association, and J. C. Von Bloeker, a naturalist from Los Angeles.

Our camps included Merced and Babcock Lakes, the latter at an altitude of approximately 10,000 feet and close to the Vogelsang Pass. We encountered an electrical storm accompanied by both rain and snow at Merced Lake, and at the Babcock Lake camp learned from the High Sierra camp manager that snow would probably remain throughout the summer.

At Babcock Lake camp, Elmer Aldrich found a flock of several Sierra Rosy Finches. This locality is not quite above timber line, so it is not always necessary to climb tortuous pinnacles to see these birds.

Clarke Nutcrackers furnished one of the chief sources of entertainment at the Babcock Lake camp, as well as along much of the high country trail. These birds seemed as much interested in our doings at camp as any jays could have been. In the variety and eccentricity of their voices I don't believe these nutcrackers could be surpassed by a jay either.

In the dense forests of lodgepole pine of the Canadian Zone we were enthralled by the Hermit Thrushes. Another week or two and we should probably have missed the pleasure of hearing them, as Park Naturalist Harwell says he has never heard them after the middle of July. Can the Russet-backed Thrushes rank with the Hermits as songsters? I do not believe so.

We were also interested in seeing a little Black Phoebe at Merced Lake, as according to the records this is rather a high altitude for this bird. We wonder if it had nested there.

Merced Lake is recommended as a particularly good camp for the ornithologist in the High Sierra. There we saw a greater number of birds, both individuals and species, than at any other of our high Sierra camps. It is close to 7,000 feet elevation.

Paul Covel, Oakland, California. August 11, 1932.



Oil Soaked Duck in the High Sierra

At our camp at Pine Crest, thirty miles from Sonora, in the Tuolumne National Forest, a small boy brought in a bird entirely covered with oil which he had found trying to get a drink of water at a camp hydrant. After several washings in warm suds the "cormorant," that everyone thought it was, turned out to be a female mallard. We had seen no mallards there previously nor did we see any after our finding this one, and moreover there was no oil anywhere in the locality; yet somewhere this mallard had surely bathed in crude oil. The young boy who rescued her was black from merely carrying the bird a few steps to our camp; the poor duck itself was more dead than alive. Her long neck looked as if it had been wrung several times and while being bathed it seemed as if she could not possibly survive the ordeal. We fed her warm bread and milk and gave her a

pan of water to drink. At the sight of the water she indicated the first sign of an interest in life. The next morning we realized that her breast and under-parts were still a mass of oil, so we bathed and rinsed her twice more.

In a couple of days, she seemed to develop an appetite for bread; beginning to show duck habits, she would take the bread and throw it into the water to soften it before eating. We gave her a variety of food, but string beans she positively refused to eat. When we mixed them with bread she would carefully pick out the bread and leave the beans. She was very fond of cooked oatmeal, but always wanted water with whatever she ate.

At first we kept her tied up with a cord, but when she did not seem inclined to wander we let her loose and built a sort of corral of fruit crates to protect her from the numerous dogs in camp.

One day deciding she should go for a swim, I put a long cord on her and went down to the lake. She swam right out for several moments, quite delighted to be in the water. But the effort tired her very much and after a very few minutes I had to take her up in my arms and carry her home. She was just heaving with over-exertion. Every day after this I took her to the lake and she apparently enjoyed staying longer each time. She would remain near the shore after a long, deep swim and preen her feathers and then dive into the water for food. The rest of the day, back at camp, she would pluck and try to oil her feathers. One thing that was noticeable was that her feathers did not get back their natural oil and she always looked very wet in the water, though on land she grew very beautiful after preening. We took care of her for three weeks, when it became necessary to break up camp. Then the small boy who had found her, claimed her, as he wanted to keep her as a pet in his yard. Finally he was prevailed upon to take the duck to the refuge on Lake Merritt.

Marguerite Ellis, Oakland, California. August 11, 1932.



Yosemite and the High Country

A vacation at the end of July is not exactly ideal for birding since the interesting period of nesting activities is practically over. However, on the occasion in mind there were several observations made which may be of interest here.

At Mirror Lake, Yosemite Valley, it was interesting to see a Band-tailed Pigeon feeding a young one, out of the nest, precisely as our domestic pigeons do, by putting its bill in that of the youngster and literally pumping food down its throat. After this strange performance the parent bird flew away and the young one settled down apparently well satisfied.

At Tuolumne Meadows the true White-crowned Sparrow of the high mountains was quite numerous. On a walk to the top of Lembert Dome one Clarke Nutcracker was seen. On the return trip a bird was observed which at first was mistaken for a Hermit Thrush; but when it alighted upon a log and showed white outer tail feathers and a white eye-ring, and again in flight disclosed buffy bars in its wings, it proved to be a Townsend Solitaire. Being also spotted with buff on the breast it was undoubtedly an immature bird. Referring to the records of this bird, "Animal Life in the Yosemite," by Grinnell and Storer, notes: "In fall recorded once at Tuolumne Meadows."

At Mono Lake along the shore and also on a strip of sand some distance off shore there were literally thousands of Northern and Wilson Phalaropes, the latter greatly outnumbering the former. When standing on the strip of sand the longer legs of the Wilson were very noticeable, and when these birds took flight the patch of white at the base of the tail as well as the absence of the white bar on the wing seen in the Northern confirmed their identification. It was a wonderful sight to see this immense flock of birds rise in flight at one time and then settle down again.

Perhaps the most interesting and amusing thing seen here was a little Tolmie Warbler energetically feeding a baby Cowbird which had doubtless been left on her "doorstep" apparently to the total sacrifice of the young Tolmie Warblers, for they were not found to be present anywhere. The little mother was certainly busy bringing worms to this strange child twice her own size and bearing not the least family resemblance. Whether the little warbler is so stupid

as not to be aware of the joke played on her by the lazy cowbird; whether her pride in such a wonderful infant compensates for the loss of her own offspring and makes her labors light, or whether from very highly developed motherly instincts she cannot bear to see any baby bird lack for proper care and food,—these questions will ever remain a mystery.

After leaving Mono Lake many Sage Thrashers were seen along the highway for several miles. At Bridgeport a flock of Yellow-headed Blackbirds were seen, and overhead on the telegraph wires were hundreds of Cliff Swallows.

In a pine tree at Donner Lake a Red-breasted Sapsucker was noticed feeding a young one. The latter was diligently trying to imitate its parent in getting food from crevices in the bark. Late in the afternoon White-throated Swifts were seen flying over the lake and here also from sundown till dark Pacific Night-hawks circled about.

These were the outstanding observations in Yosemite and the higher country, although for the entire trip seventy-three species were recorded.

A. B. Stephens, San Francisco, California. August 25, 1932.



August Field Trip was taken on Sunday, the 14th, to Tennessee Cove, Marin County, with twenty-three members and six guests. The day was cool and foggy, with a strong west wind.

After leaving the train at Manzanita, the usual visit was made to the adjacent marsh to look for Clapper Rail. Three individuals were found; one of them strutted about as if he wanted everybody to be able to recognize a Clapper Rail whenever one should present itself. Least Sandpipers circled about, finally alighting on the muddy beach. Almost as soon as the party had left the marsh, eight Hudsonian Curlew appeared and settled down on the marsh, which seemed to be an excellent feeding ground.

Two Barn Owls, probably young ones driven from home by the parent birds as soon as they were able to care for themselves, were found in the live oaks at the entrance of the valley. This was a new experience to find Barn Owls so near the station; usually they have been found at the far end of the valley.

Numbers of Pileolated Warblers and a pair of Tolmie Warblers were found along the little stream which flows past one of the ranch houses. Willow Goldfinches still attending their young were present in a thistle patch.

A lone Northern Phalarope was so busy feeding, in a shallow pool near the beach, that he appeared totally oblivious to the presence of an interested group of people.

Upon our return, a side trip was taken along one of the small brush-covered streams where Wren-tits and Western Gnatcatchers were seen at very close range.

Two Prairie Falcons were seen soaring over the hills not far from Manzanita. The long, pointed wings and whitish underparts were characteristic. This species, not commonly found in the humid coast belt, is known to nest in Corral Hollow, Alameda County, and in the vicinity of Mt. Diablo, two locations not too far distant from Marin County for such a master of flight. Perhaps the spirit of modern times is influencing other creatures as well as human beings. So why shouldn't Prairie Falcons indulge in the exhilaration of exploring new airways after the serious business of raising a family has been finished? One individual was hovering in the manner of a Red-tailed Hawk, probably trying to capture a mouse. Prairie Falcons do not confine their diet entirely to birds; small mammals and insects are taken whenever possible.

A total of fifty-six species was noted as follows: Brown Pelican; Farallon Cormorant; Great Blue and Black-crowned Night Herons; Ruddy Duck; Turkey Vulture; Sharp-shinned, Cooper and Red-tailed Hawks; Prairie Falcon; California Quail; Clapper Rail; Killdeer; Hudsonian Curlew; Least Sandpiper; Northern Phalarope; Western, California and Heermann Gulls; Murre; Barn Owl; Anna and Allen Hummingbirds; Kingfisher; Red-shafted Flicker; Black

Phoebe; Western Flycatcher; Rough-winged, Barn and Cliff Swallows; Steller and California Jays; Crow; Chickadee; Titmouse; Bush-tit; Wren-tit; House and Bewick Wrens; Russet-backed Thrush; Western Bluebird; Western Gnatcatcher; Tolmie and Pileolated Warblers; Meadowlark; Red-winged and Brewer Blackbirds; Black-headed Grosbeak; Purple Finch; Linnet; Pine Siskin; American Goldfinch; Spotted and Brown Towhees; Savannah and Lark Sparrows.

C. A. Bryant, Historian.



Audubon Notes

September Meeting will be held on Thursday, the 8th, at 8 p. m., room 19, 2nd floor, Ferry Building.

The speaker of the evening will be Mr. E. Lowell Sumner, Vertebrate Zoology Museum, Berkeley. Subject: "Studies of Young Hawks and Owls." The lecture will be illustrated.



September Field Trip will be taken on Sunday, the 11th, to the bay shore at Lincoln Park, Alameda. San Francisco members will take Southern Pacific Alameda Ferry at 9:45 a. m., and either north or south side train to Lincoln Park Station, where party will gather at 11 a. m. East Bay members may reach Lincoln Park by taking Alameda bus in Oakland at Fourteenth and Broadway, walking through the park to Lincoln Park Station opposite the tennis courts. Bring luncheon. C. A. Bryant, leader.

Mr. George T. Marsh, Charter Member, died August 18, 1932.

Dr. F. W. D'Evelyn, Charter Member and Past President, died August 29, 1932.

August Meeting: The 181st regular meeting was held on August 11th, in room 19, Ferry Building, with thirty members and guests present. First Vice-President Chas. A. Bryant presiding.

Field observations were reported as follows:

Commander and Mrs. Parmenter: July 26th, Cliff House, Wandering Tattlers; July 28th, San Andreas Lake, August 2nd, Crystal Springs Lake, Caspian Terns; August 2nd, near Filoli, a flock of 200 or more Violet-green Swallows.

Mrs. A. B. Stephens: July 28th, Cliff House, two Ruddy and three Black Turnstones, four Wandering Tattlers.

Mr. Rosher: July 17th, Tiburon, colony of Black-crowned Night Herons with young.

Mrs. Otis H. Smith: July 22nd, San Anselmo, Western Tanager.

The evening was devoted to vacation experiences, some of which are given in this issue of "The Gull."

Audubon Association of the Pacific

For the Study and Protection of Birds

President.....	Brighton C. Cain.....	503 Plaza Bldg., Oakland
Corresponding Secretary.....	C. B. Lastreto.....	260 California St., San Francisco
Treasurer.....	Mrs. A. B. Stephens.....	1695 Filbert St., San Francisco

Monthly meeting second Thursday, 8 P. M., Room 19, Ferry Building.

Address Bulletin correspondence to Mrs. A. B. Stephens, Editor, 1695 Filbert St., San Francisco.

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